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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KWBG IS GAZA DISENGAGEMENT ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS GOI INTERNAL

SUBJECT: FM SHALOM'S BRIEFING TO DIPLOMATIC CORPS

1. Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom summoned Chiefs of Mission to Jerusalem June 22 to give an update on disengagement from Gaza and related issues. Clarifying PM Sharon's previous comments concerning disengagement under fire, he said that extremist attacks would halt disengagement only long enough to allow the IDF to deal with the specific threats or attacks, but that otherwise it would proceed on schedule. He also pleaded with the international community not to be in direct contact with Hamas or Islamic Jihad, saying that such contact undercuts moderates and strengthens the hands of extremists. He repeatedly stated his hope that withdrawal from Gaza would create a new model for peace, and would lead to better relations with the Arab world and a re-opening of the Arab embassies and interest sections closed in October 2000.

2. He also stated his belief that what he termed Palestinian President Abbas' failure to comply with the commitments made at the Sharm Al-Sheikh summit threatens Israel's ability to maintain the popular political will to continue with withdrawal and endangers the other (unspecified) steps the GOI is planning to take in the near future to ease conditions for Palestinians. A highlight of the address was a four minute video of a recent would-be female suicide bomber stopped at the Erez checkpoint on her way to blow up a Be'er Sheva Hospital where she had received burn treatments.

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